



Directorate of
Intelligence

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**Syria: Assad and the
Peace Process** [REDACTED]

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An Intelligence Assessment

Approved for Release
Date JUN 1999

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November 1988
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Syria: Assad and the Peace Process

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An Intelligence Assessment

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November 1988 13

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**Syria: Assad and the
Peace Process** b (3)

Key Judgments

*Information available
as of 21 October 1988
was used in this report.*

Syrian President Hafiz al-Assad retains an almost singlehanded ability to undermine movement toward a political settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Assad does not oppose in principle a peaceful resolution to the 40-year conflict with Israel, but he is determined to block any peace initiative that does not fully consider Syrian interests—particularly the return of the Golan Heights—or attempts to circumvent Damascus. To this end, Assad is prepared to intimidate Jordan and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), or provoke Israel, in a manner that would stalemate progress toward a political settlement not to his liking.

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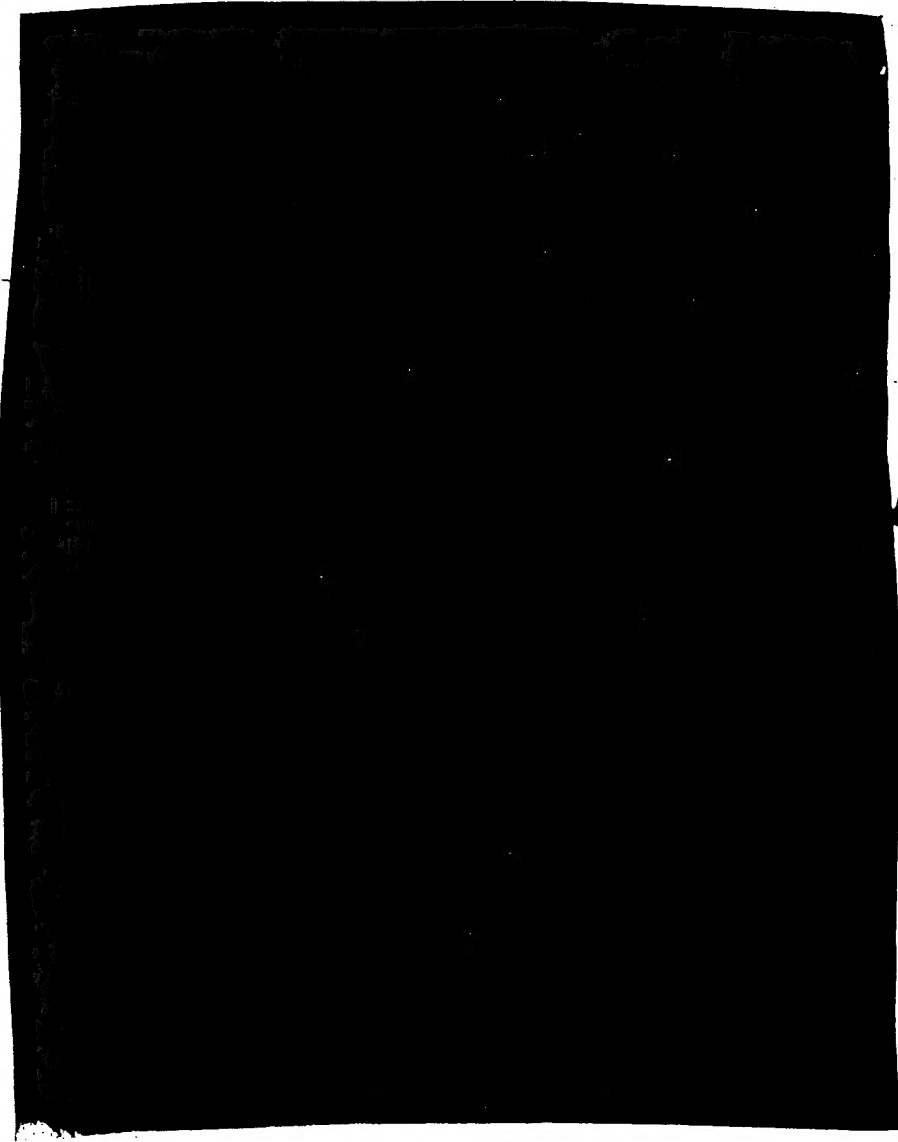
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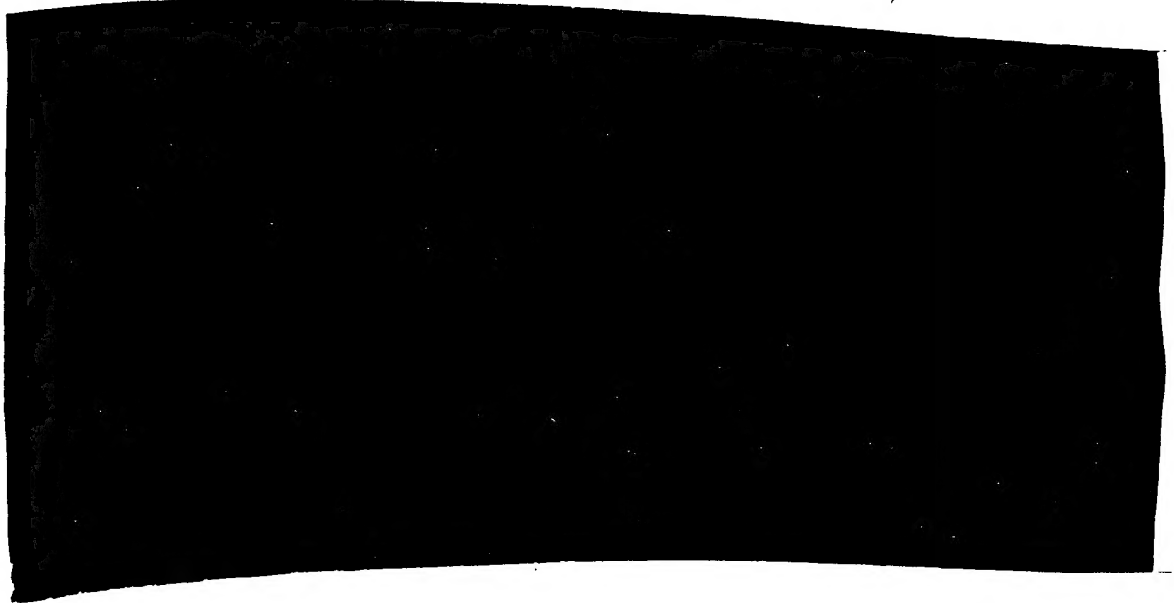
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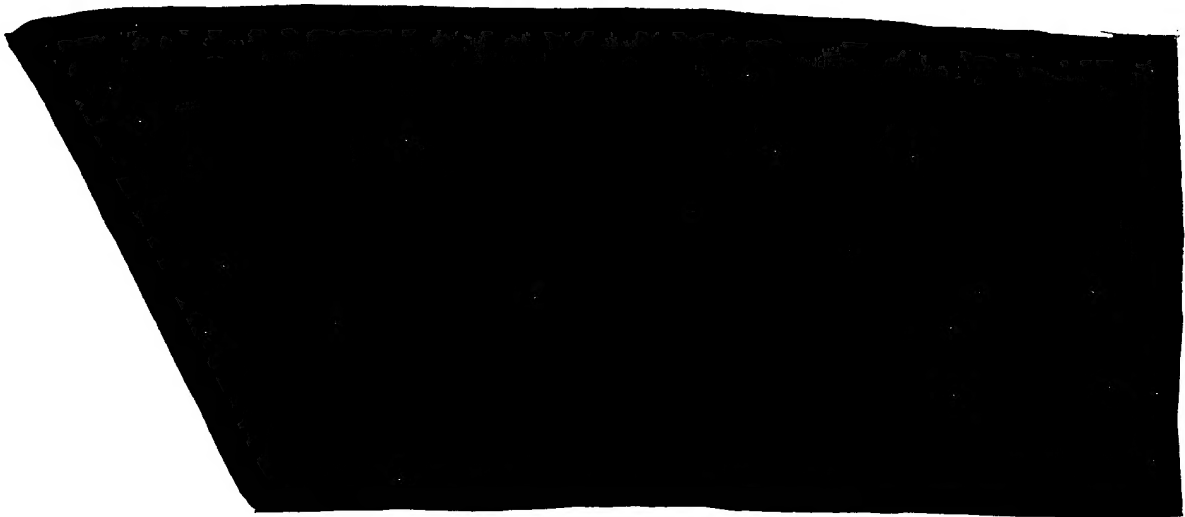
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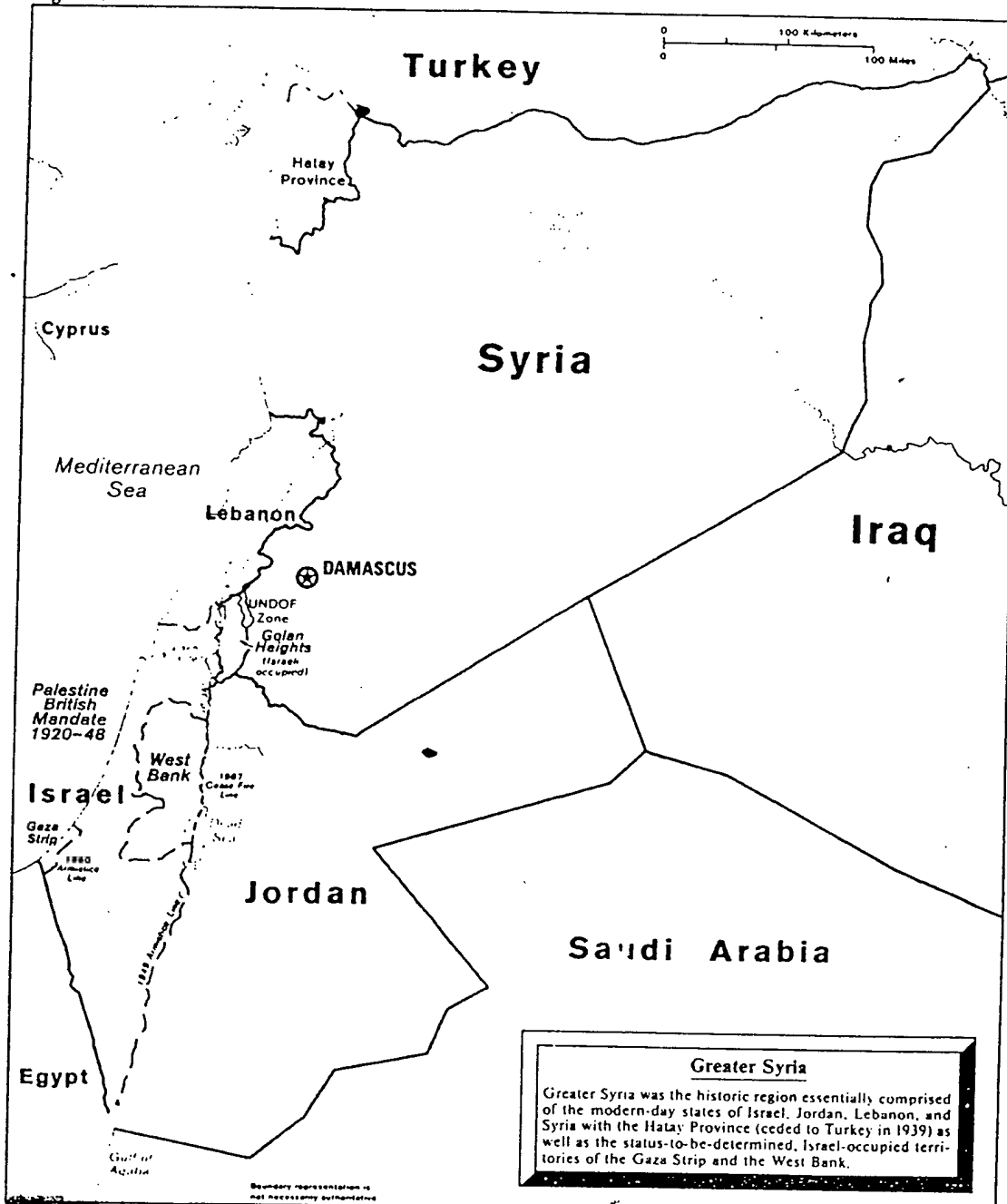
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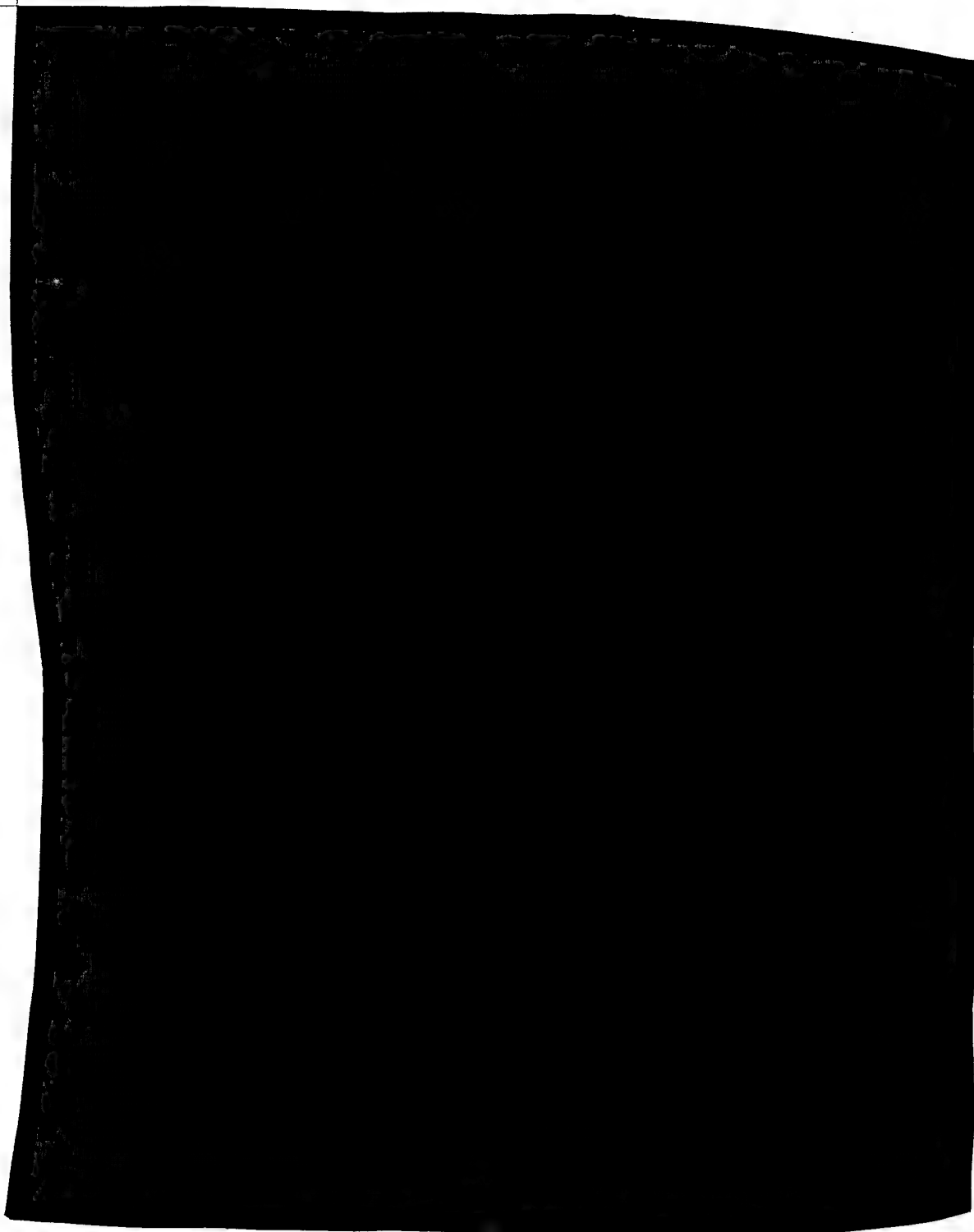
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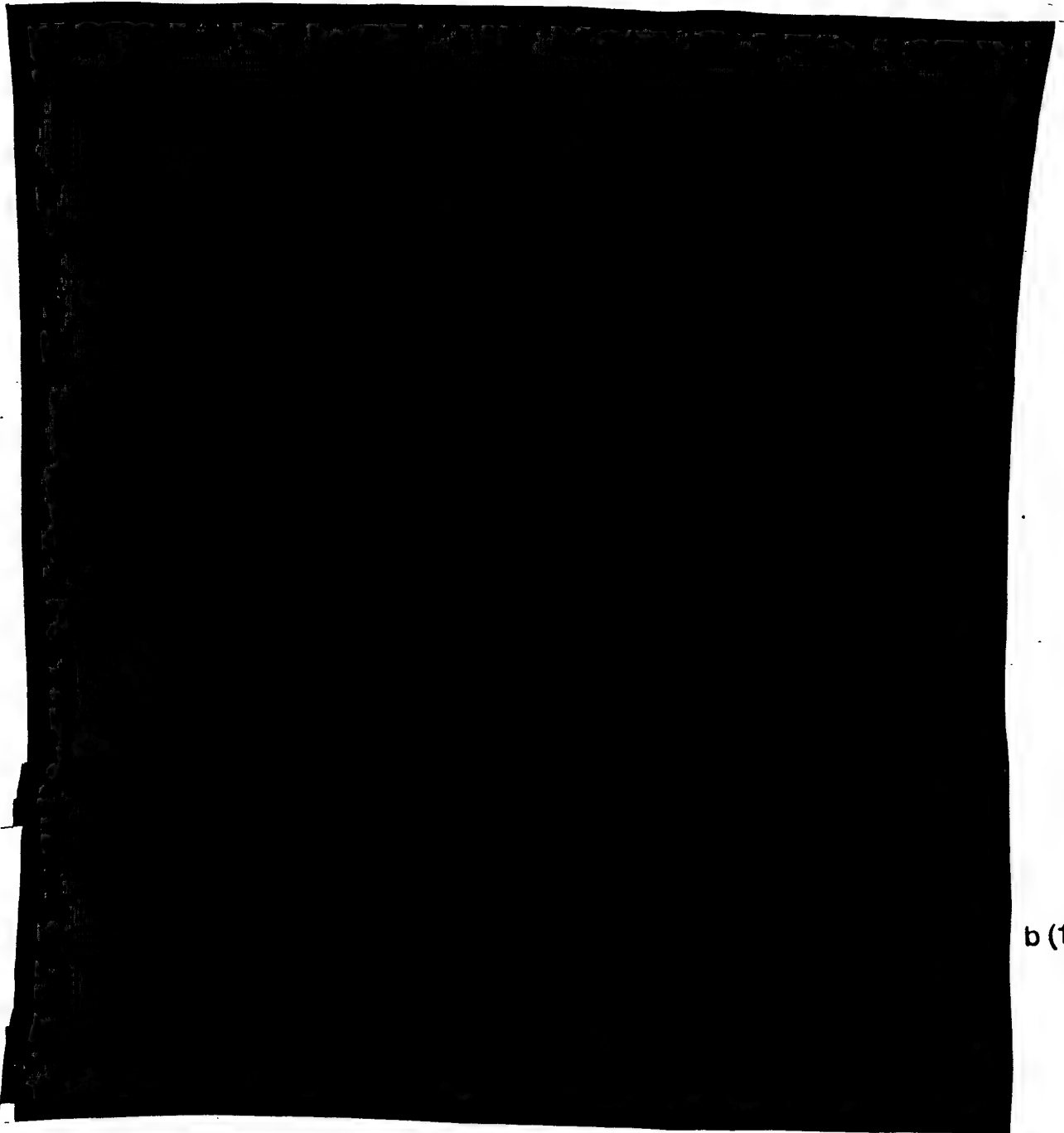
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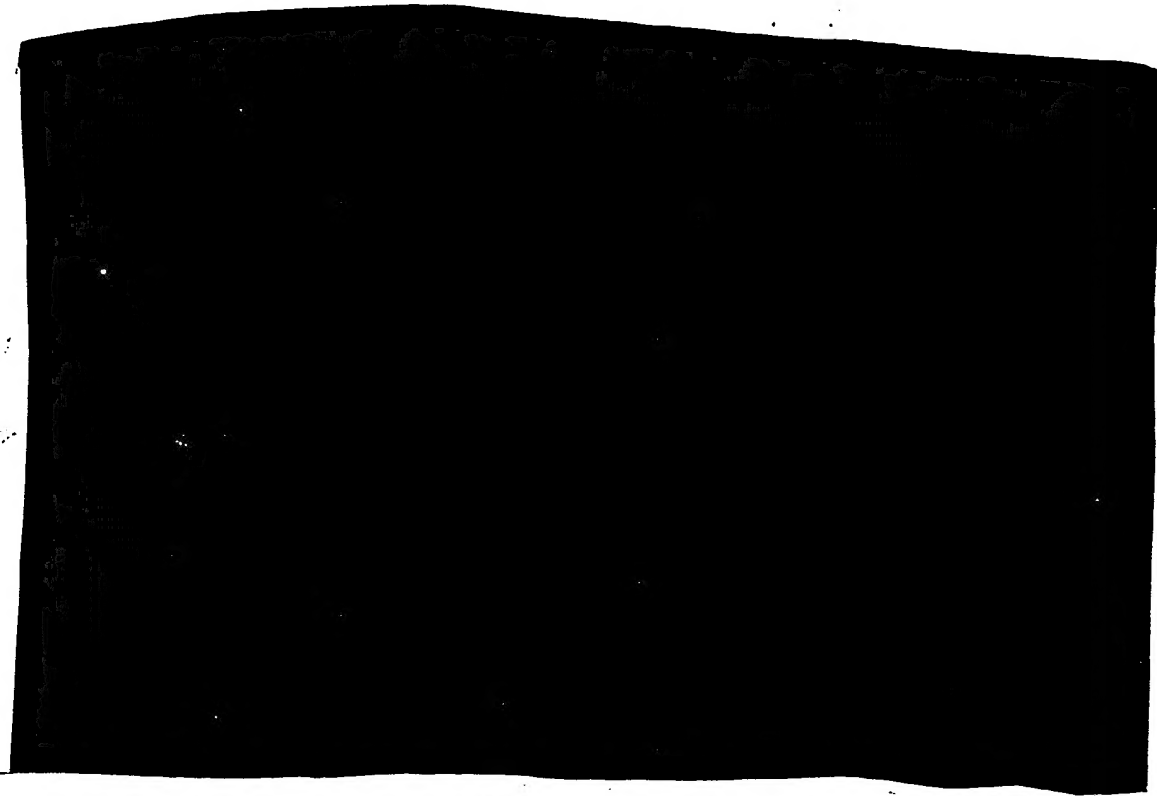
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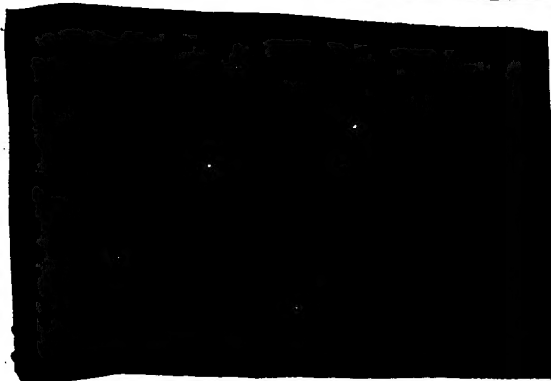
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Damascus's ability to control events in South Lebanon is very limited, in our judgment. Its behavior indicates Syria wants to see Israel repulsed from Lebanon by force of arms, but recognizes that the confrontation with Israel could escalate beyond control on the heels of increased cross-border operations by Lebanese and Palestinian zealots. We believe Assad is counting on Syria's improved military capability and Damascus's link to Moscow to dissuade Israel from retaliating against Syria directly. Assad's brinksmanship in the south could backfire, possibly triggering another major Israeli incursion or longer term presence in southern Lebanon.

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Challenging Israel in Lebanon

We believe that Lebanon will remain the principal battleground in Syria's confrontation with Israel. Assad has chosen to challenge Israel in South Lebanon, rather than on the Golan, in order to reduce the risk of open warfare with Israel, avoid losing Syrian lives in the conflict, and limit the prospects for Israeli retaliation against Syrian targets. Activism on the part of Lebanese and Palestinian Arabs, moreover, helps foster the perception of the universal and enduring nature of the Arab struggle against Israel and builds what Assad hopes will be irresistible pressure on Israel to come to terms with the Arabs.

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Damascus has sought to channel the energies of Lebanese and Palestinian groups, particularly the Shia fundamentalist Hizballah movement, into the confrontation with Israel and its surrogates in the security zone.

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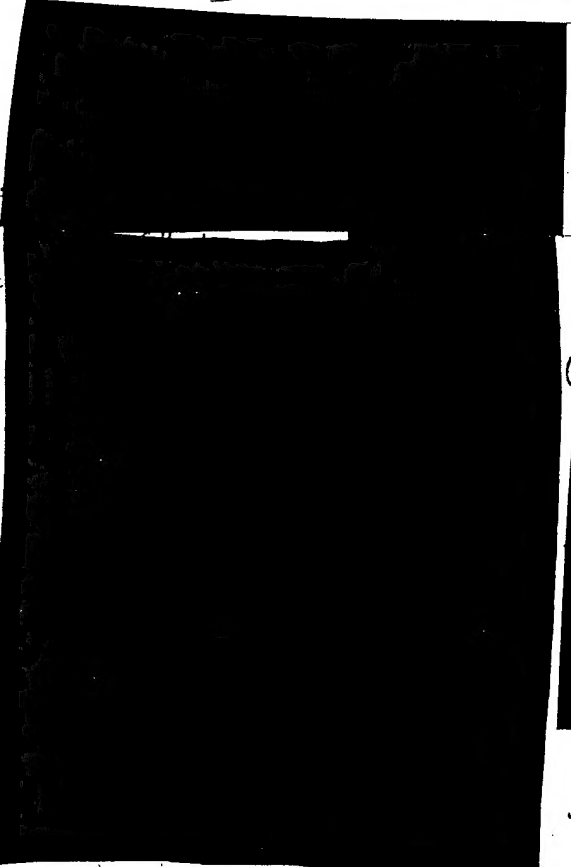
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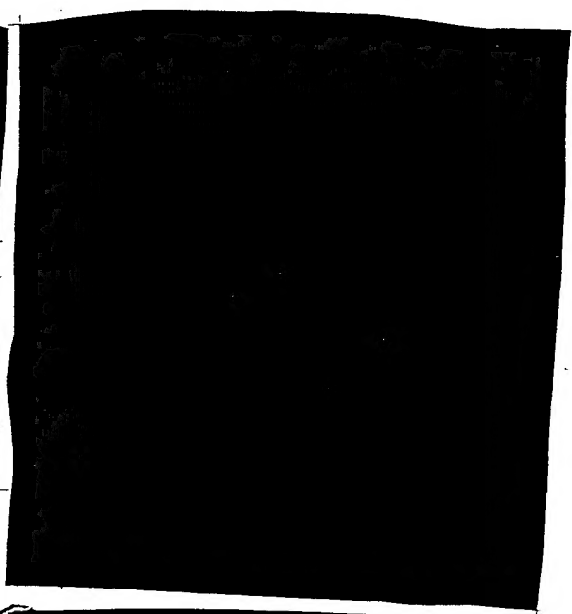
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